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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SNAPSHOT

# Former War Zones Turn Tourist Sites

**USAID works on turning Afghanistan into an appealing tourist destination in not so distant future**



Photo: Robert Sauers/USAID

*Site of the larger Buddha statue after it was destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.*

***After attending USAID-sponsored Tourism Investment Conferences in Panjsher and Bamiyan, several travel companies committed to develop the tourism industry in these two peaceful Afghan provinces.***

Given the images of Afghanistan that appear in the news, most people would have difficulty picturing Afghanistan as an appealing tourist destination. But for two western businesses, this is precisely the Afghanistan they envision, and they are putting their money into making that vision a reality.

Afghanistan has great potential as a tourist destination, with natural wonders, a unique history, and a vibrant cultural heritage. However, after decades of underinvestment, tourist services such as hotels and restaurants are difficult to find outside of the cities. In order to attract Afghan and foreign private business to investing in developing these services, the provinces of Bamiyan and Panjsher recently hosted tourism conferences designed to showcase the opportunities and advantages offered by Afghanistan's historical and natural wonders.

Both conferences produced immediate results. After attending the Panjsher conference, Outdoor Challenge, a British travel company, committed to develop an adventure tourism center in the province. The center will support a variety of tourist services for adventurous travelers, including white-water rafting, trekking, and hang gliding. After the Bamiyan conference, the GoldenStateGroup and Global Partners, both American companies, agreed to a joint venture to expand the hotel and restaurant services at a guest house run by a local women's development group in Red City, a UNESCO cultural site.

"We feel that the woman's center is now finally self-sustainable and able to continue its great work in developing the skills of Afghan women in the hospitality industry," said Sean Khalji, CEO of GoldenState.

USAID-sponsored Tourism Investment Conferences in Panjsher and Bamiyan provinces represented a coming together of Afghan and international businesses, the Afghan provincial governments, and the U.S. Government in the cause of promoting investment in the safe, tourist-friendly areas of Afghanistan.